



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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## NOAA Fisheries Service Announces the Publication of a Final Rule to Establish a Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program in the Gulf of Mexico

NOAA Fisheries Service, on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, approved Amendment 26 to the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan to implement an IFQ program for the Gulf of Mexico commercial red snapper fishery on October 26, 2006. NOAA Fisheries Service published the final rule implementing Amendment 26 on November 22, 2006 (71 FR 67447). The intended effect of the IFQ program is to reduce overcapacity in the commercial red snapper fishery and to eliminate, to the extent possible, the problems associated with derby fishing, in order to assist the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in achieving optimum yield from the fishery. The IFQ program will be implemented on January 01, 2007.

### Notification to Shareholders (Eligible Class 1 or Class 2 License Holders) Regarding the IFQ Program

NOAA Fisheries Service will send each individual holding a red snapper license on the date of publication of the final rule a letter via certified mail return receipt requested, outlining information about their shares and allocation and the IFQ program. This information will include:

- Gulf red snapper landings associated with the owner's license during each year of the applicable landings history.
- The highest average annual red snapper landings based on the owner's applicable landings history.
- Preliminary determination of the owner's initial IFQ share based on the highest average annual landings associated with the owner's applicable landings history.
- Preliminary determination of the initial IFQ allocation.
- Instructions for appeals.
- General instructions related to the IFQ online reporting system, including how to set up an online account.
- A user identification number - the personal

identification number will be provided in a subsequent letter.

- Copy of the final rule.

The information in the notification letter may require a response from the shareholder by a certain deadline. Please read the letter carefully and respond accordingly. If you have not received your letter by December 22, 2006, please contact NOAA Fisheries Service at the number listed above.

### Notification to Dealers Regarding the IFQ Program

NOAA Fisheries Service is in the process of distributing information pertinent to the IFQ program to each dealer with a valid Gulf reef fish dealer permit. Any such dealer is eligible to receive a red snapper IFQ dealer endorsement which can be downloaded from the IFQ Web site at <http://ifq.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> once an IFQ account has been established. The information package will include general information about dealer requirements under the IFQ program and instructions for accessing the IFQ Web site and establishing an IFQ dealer account.

### Commercial Quota

Fishery managers are currently considering reducing the red snapper total allowable catch (TAC) and, consequently, the commercial and recreational red snapper quotas, to end overfishing within the time frame approved in the red snapper rebuilding plan. Consequently, the amount of 2007 TAC is uncertain. For this reason, the IFQ program specifies a two-step process for distributing 2007 IFQ allocations. This two-step process requires NOAA Fisheries Service to:

- 1) Issue initial 2007 IFQ allocations based on an initial commercial red snapper quota of 2.55 million pound (mp) whole weight; then
- 2) Make any needed adjustments in IFQ allocations after the actual 2007

commercial quota becomes effective and no later than July 1, 2007. Any adjustments to 2007 IFQ allocations made after the 2007 commercial quota is finalized will be distributed among initial IFQ shareholders in direct proportion to the amount of IFQ share each was initially allocated.

NOAA Fisheries Service is currently developing proposed interim measures that would specify a 6.5 mp TAC for the 2007 fishing year. If approved and implemented, the commercial catch quota defined by this TAC would equal 3.3 mp whole weight.

#### **Useful Definitions for the IFQ program**

**IFQ Share:** A percentage of the commercial red snapper quota given to each shareholder at the beginning of the IFQ program. Shares determine the amount of Gulf red snapper IFQ allocation a shareholder will receive each year.

**IFQ Allocation:** The amount of Gulf red snapper, in pounds gutted weight, an IFQ allocation holder is authorized to land during a given fishing year provided they possess a valid commercial permit for Gulf reef fish and a Gulf red snapper IFQ vessel endorsement. Allocation is required to harvest, possess, land, or sell red snapper. IFQ allocation is distributed annually to IFQ shareholders. Annual IFQ allocation is determined by the amount of the shareholder's IFQ share and the amount of the annual commercial red snapper quota.

For a complete description of the regulations associated with the IFQ program, please obtain a copy of the final rule from NOAA Fisheries Service at the above address. Electronic copies of the final rule may be obtained from the *Federal Register* Web site at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

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